

## **Lehi Junction-Railroad Street**

**By Richard Van Wagoner**

Lehi has had several interesting historical street names. Second North was known in the earliest days as Castle Street-no one knows why. Wall Street was so named because George Comer, who lived on that road, made a bundle in the stock market. Peck Lane, Trinnaman Lane, and Whipple Drive are names in honor of prominent Lehi families.

Railroad Street is in a section of town once known as Lehi Junction because of the railroads that bisected the area (the present vicinity of General Refractories). The Utah Souther came through in mid-1872's. In November of that year the Lehi and Tintic Railroad was incorporated with intent to link the two areas. Ore from the rich veins in the tintic Mining District, which began to produce in abundance in the late 1860's, was being hauled by wagon down the canyon near Homansville, up the west side of Utah Lake, across the Jordan River Bridge, and around the Point of the Mountain to Salt Lake smelters. The businessmen behind the Lehi and Tintic Railroad ventures could not raise sufficient capital, however, and the idea was abandoned.

The Salt Lake and Western Railroad, headquartered in Boston, Massachusetts was incorporated on May 30, 1881 specifically to link Lehi with the Tintic Mining District. The fifty-eight miles of track eventually laid by the S.L. & Western crew left the Utah Southern line at Lehi Junction, crossed a trestle over the Jordan River, and followed the historic Overland and Pony Express Trail west through Cedar Valley, Five Mile Pass, and Rush Valley before reaching the mining areas of Silver City, Mammoth, Diamond and Eureka.

In 1894, the Salt Lake and Mercur Railroad, serving the gold camps of Mercur and Manning, branched thirteen and a half miles westerly from the S.L. and Western line (then part of the Oregon Short Line system) near Fairfield. Though the route from Topliff south in Tintic Junction was abandoned by Union Pacific in

1905. Shay engines continued to negotiate the steep four percent grade of the S.L. & Mercur feeder line until November 15, 1913.

Several important industries in addition to heavy metal mining were served by the “Sage Hen” as locals liked to call the trains that rode the line westward. The manufacturing of sugar at the Lehi works of the Utah Sugar Company required tons of limestone. A major source was Topliff, a spur on the S.L. & Western in the early 1890’s. Fairfield was also a central point for extensive sheep ranching, and large shipments of wool were made on the railroad during shearing time. The firebrick industry, which had extensive clay beds six miles west of Lehi at Clinton, was also served from the turn of the century until the 1940’s.

Lehi Junction, starting point for the S.L. & Western, was a relatively self-contained community which began to develop soon after a depot was built there in late 1881. The Franklin School (545 West State) had been completed in the area in 1875, and in 1894, was constructed at the Southeast corner of Fifth West and Twelfth North.

Railroad work has its hazards, and while many injuries befell early workers, the saddest accident in Lehi Junction history was the October 24, 1894 death of Henry Winn, a young husband and father of three. A crew was climbing on a hand car to travel to a work assignment when Mr. Price, the section boss, picked up a loaded pistol. The gun accidentally discharged, narrowly missing Price and another man, but striking young Winn in the throat and lower part of his face. He took the faltering steps and collapsed. The following day his funeral was the first of many that would be eventually held in the North Branch Meeting House.

Railroad were the economic lifeblood of the Junction, spawning general stores, leaching works, brickyards, assay offices, and an artificial stone plant. The dominant buildings, in the area, were the railroad facilities. In addition to a depot where agents Eleazer Evans, Mosiah Evans, Lou Oakley, Sam Stark, S.M. Parker, F.H. Heidenreich, John Woods, W.L. Gather, and John a. Cottrell sold tickets and

handled freight, there was a large roundhouse and machine shop, both of which were destroyed in a freak gust of wind on October 2, 1884.

Though rebuilt and used for another four decades, the roundhouse was again destroyed in 1922. A Union Pacific crew coupled onto a string of empty cars north of the roundhouse and steamed south towards Lehi. The engine and two cars passed safely through the roundhouse before the third car, a rail loader three feet higher than the shed's door, pulled the building to the ground in "one of the most complete and thorough jobs of building wrecking ever seen in the section," the local newspaper reported. The only person in the building at the time, Thomas Yates, crawled from the debris, lucky to be alive. He told the local newspaper reporter that at the moment of impact, "the soot and dirt made the air black as night and too thick to breathe." As roundhouse supervisor, Yates oversaw the construction of a new building.

Lehi Junction agency-- or "Cutler Station" as it was officially known in honor of Lehi sugarman Thomas R. Cutler--was closed in 1931, in the middle of the depression. The Utah State Utilities Commission ruled that there was insufficient business to operate two Union Pacific stations in Lehi. The "Sage Hen" as Salt Lake & Western trains were affectionately dubbed, maintained runs to Fairfield and Five Mile Pass until World War II, when the line was abandoned. The trestle site across the Jordan River can still be seen from I-15, and much of the old roadbed west of the river is intact. The track terminus at Lehi Junction can still be seen west of the Lehi Black Company as one travels west on the Frontage Road.

All that remains of the railroad facilities at Lehi Junction today is the Union Pacific trestle and a sign that denotes the areas as "Cutler". Gone is the great water tower which slaked the thirst of steam locomotives. Cows graze where the roundhouse once stood, and the row of small homes where company men and their families lived under the shade of giant silver poplars is but a memory for the surviving children of those old-time railroad men.

One surviving building on historic Railroad street is Johnson's General Store. A small grocery had first been established on the site by George Comer in the early 1880's. After a change of several owners Charles L. Johnson purchased the business from William Melanthay in October 1905. Johnson moved his family into a three room house attached to the south side of the mercantile. "Much of the store business" explained his daughter Lucile White, "was filling orders to be sent out to the mining towns of Sunshine, Topliff and Mercur." Railroad work crew, who lived in outfit cars on a siding near the depot, were also a source of business. A popular grocery item was the fresh bread delivered daily by rail from the Royal Break Company in Salt Lake City.

In 1916-17, Johnson built a new brick store near the frame one. In 1926, the family moved to Pleasant Grove, but returned to manage the store at Lehi Junction in 1934. The Johnson General Store was managed by Dean Barnhurst, Johnson's son-in-law, until the mid-1950's when it closed. The building, now vacant, remains a lonely sentimental from the past--a ghost-like memory of long-ago years when Railroad Street was the hustling, bustling heart of commercial activity at Lehi Junction.